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SUBJECT: GUIDANCE: MIDDLE EAST BRIEFING, DECEMBER 18

¶1. (SBU) This is an action message. USUN is authorized to draw from points in para 2 below during the Middle East Briefing scheduled for December 18.

¶2. (U) Talking points.

-- I would like to thank Under Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East. Today I would like to make two main points.

-- First, we welcome the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1850. It is a positive and forward-looking document that has put the Security Council and the international community on record confirming the irreversibility of the bilateral negotiations towards a lasting peace through confidential, uninterrupted and continuous negotiations for a two-state solution, born at Annapolis.

-- The parties have and continue to make their best efforts to achieve an agreement. They have reported progress in their negotiations and in the work that is being done on the ground, building the institutions of the Palestinian state, and implementing their Roadmap obligations.

-- This is the first time in almost a decade Palestinians and Israelis are addressing all the issues in a comprehensive way to try to obtain a solution. Israel and the Palestinians have expressed common aspirations. We are much further along than we were in 2007 when the Annapolis Conference was held, and indeed much further than we were in 2001.

-- Based on this progress, at their historic November 9 briefing for the Quartet, the parties requested the continued support of the international community including respect for the mutually-agreed principles of their bilateral dialogue and the confidential nature of the negotiations, and that third parties should not intervene in the negotiations absent the joint request of both parties. In Resolution 1850 they have a tangible reflection of that commitment.

-- President Bush has called for negotiations to be intensified in order to put an end to the conflict and to establish as soon as possible a democratic state of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

-- The second point I would like to underscore today is our continuing concern for the welfare of the innocent people of Gaza and in the towns and cities of southern Israel.

-- As the Quartet made clear at its meeting this week, a lasting solution to the situation in Gaza can only be achieved through peaceful means. Restoring Palestinian

unity based on the commitments of the Palestinian Liberation Organization -- the legitimate and internationally-recognized representative of the Palestinian people -- to non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous commitments and obligations is central to this process.

-- The Quartet expressed its concern that the Egyptian-brokered calm in Gaza had been challenged; condemned the indiscriminate attacks against Israel; and called for an immediate cessation of violence, including attacks against commercial crossings that prevent the import of humanitarian supplies and basic commodities, without which the people of Gaza will continue to suffer.

-- As the largest single-state contributor of aid to the Palestinian people, the United States is deeply committed to seeing through the delivery of humanitarian aid. The U.S. calls for the continuous provision of humanitarian supplies to the people of Gaza.

-- The Council should not lose sight of the root cause for the current situation. While the vast majority of the people of Gaza simply want to get on with their lives, Hamas and other groups continue to instigate violence, launching more than 200 rocket and mortar attacks in the past two months against Israel and humanitarian aid crossing points into Gaza. The U.S. calls for an immediate and permanent end to these attacks, which represent an ongoing threat to international peace and security, and for the full dismantlement of the infrastructure of terrorism according to agreed Roadmap obligations.

-- Continuing progress in Jenin and the successful deployment of the Palestinian security services to Hebron are strong counter-examples to the violence in Gaza. These developments demonstrate that Israelis and Palestinians can work together to advance the cause of peace.

-- Finally, just a short word on Lebanon. Full implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701 is vital to a peaceful and secure Lebanon. As with the establishment of a Special Tribunal under UN Security Council resolution 1757 to try those responsible for the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and others, the United States strongly supports the full implementation of these resolutions. We also urge that adequate funds be provided for the opening of the Special Tribunal on March 1, 2009.

-- The Secretary General's latest reports on Resolutions 1559 and 1701 clearly express the importance of Hizballah disarmament and of ending arms smuggling across the

Lebanese-Syrian border. As the national dialogue in Lebanon progresses, we look forward to continued efforts to implement these core elements of the resolutions.

End talking points.
RICE